



# Critical Thinking Skills Activity

## Analyzing Primary and Secondary Sources

**SOCIAL STUDIES OBJECTIVE:** Identify and use primary and secondary sources to acquire information.



### Learning the Skill

A **primary source** is a record of an event by a person who witnessed it. Primary sources include letters, journals, legal documents, autobiographies, drawings, and photographs. An example of a primary source is a magazine article on migraine research written by the doctor who directed the research. A **secondary source** is written later by someone who did not witness the event. An example of a secondary source is a magazine article about migraines written by a writer who collected information from several medical journals.

Researchers use both primary and secondary sources. It is important to check secondary sources to be certain they are accurate. To determine if a source is a primary or secondary source, follow these steps:

- Identify the author of the document.
- Identify when and where the document was written.
- Read the document for its content.
- Identify the author's personal beliefs and attitudes.
- Determine what kind of information the document provides and what is missing.

### Applying the Skill

**Directions:** Read paragraphs A and B below about Russia during the years following its civil war, which ended in 1920. One is a primary source. The other is a secondary source. Then answer the questions on the next page.

A

The Russian Soviet Socialist Republic is the name of the political system that won the Russian Civil War of 1919–1920. However, the Russian people were not very important in the new government. All of the power belonged to the Communist Party. Communist Party members held all of the key positions in the Soviet government, and the Communist Party was controlled by its own Central Committee. Vladimir Lenin, the Communist Party leader, headed this committee.

SOURCE FOR A: Encyclopedia Britannica. Adapted from "Russian Civil War."

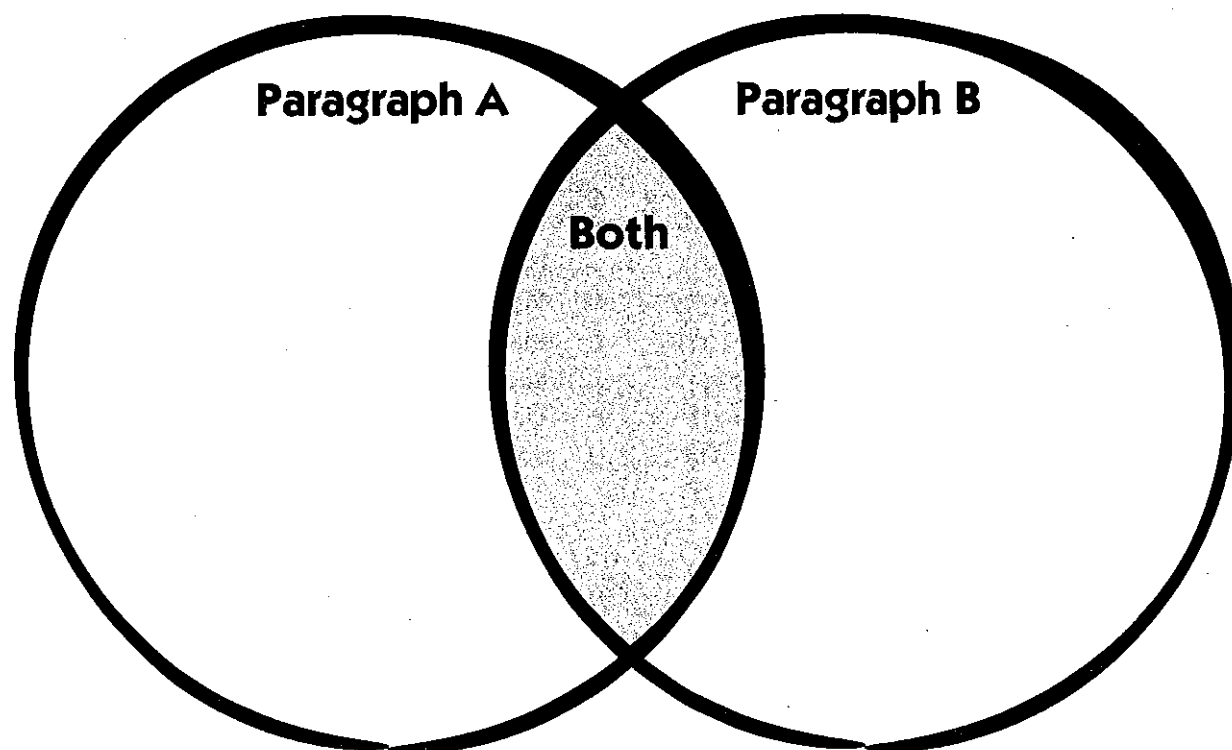
SOURCE FOR B: Khrushchev, Nikita, and Crankshaw, Edward. *Khrushchev Remembers*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1970. (Nikita Khrushchev is a former leader of the Soviet Union.)

B

"Those first years of Soviet Power [after the Russian Civil War] were years of struggle and hardship and self-sacrifice. But the people still believed in the [Communist] Party. Even the most illiterate [unable to read or write] of our citizens understood the Party's slogans and rallying cries . . . Most of us willingly submitted to privation [being deprived or going without] because, as we saw it, we had to squeeze the last drop of productivity out of our resources in order to industrialize the country as quickly as possible. If we were to survive, we had to catch up with the capitalists . . . But on the whole the people gladly underwent these sufferings for the Party's sake. And in the space of a few years we brought a modern industrial society into being."

**RUSSIA'S LANDSCAPE AND HISTORY****Critical Thinking Skills Activity (continued)**

1. Which paragraph is the primary source? Explain the reasoning behind your answer.
2. Which paragraph is the secondary source? Explain the reasoning behind your answer.
3. What factual information do both articles contain? To answer this question fill out the Venn diagram below. Show the facts that both descriptions include and the facts presented by the separate articles.

**Practicing the Skill**

**Directions:** Answer the following questions by circling the letter of the correct answer.

1. Which of the following is a primary source?
  - A. an article about Russia in the local newspaper
  - B. a biography about Nikita Khrushchev
  - C. a segment about communism on a TV newsmagazine show
  - D. a journal entry by a Russian citizen written during the civil war
2. Which of the following is a secondary source?
  - A. a letter written by a member of the Communist Party
  - B. the will of a Russian soldier who died during the civil war
  - C. a biography of Nikita Khrushchev
  - D. a photograph of a battle in the Russian civil war